

# JEDI Cut\_1

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## SPEAKERS

Ron Wasserstein, Kim Sellers, Adrian Coles

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Ron Wasserstein 00:05

Hello, everyone. Increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion is essential to the future of statistics and data science and to the ASA. We win as a profession when we include more diverse perspectives, hear more diverse voices, and equitably engage all communities, especially communities that have been marginalized. Today, we talk with Kim Sellers, chair of the ASA's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Outreach Group, and Adrian Coles, chair of the Committee on Minorities in Statistics and co-chair of the ASA's Anti-Racism Task Force. Kim is a professor of statistics at Georgetown, and Adrian is associate director of biostatistics at Bristol Myers Squibb. So, let's get rolling. Let's begin by just giving you each the opportunity to say a little bit more about yourself than what I did in the introduction. So, Adrian, I'll start with you.

A

Adrian Coles 01:00

All right, thanks, Ron. I really appreciate that. So, as Ron just mentioned, I serve actively with the Committee on Minorities in Statistics and the Anti-Racism Task Force within the American Statistical Association. Outside of professional service, I am a clinical researcher at Bristol Myers Squibb focused on late-phase immunology assets, a very exciting area of research. When I look into my background, I think the two things that are most important to share with this audience. One, I am a person who grew up in an economically disadvantaged community. I grew up in a very poor area. And so I am the textbook example of a person who comes from a poor background, who is able to change their stars through education, particularly in the STEM area. And in addition to that, I'm also a retired United States Marine. Oorah for any other service members who may come across this video.

R

Ron Wasserstein 01:59

Thank you, Adrian. Kim?

K

Kim Sellers 02:01

Thank you, Ron, for the opportunity to speak with you today. As mentioned, I am a professor at Georgetown University, in the mathematics and statistics department, where my research area involves count data modeling or a particular facet of that research branch. And, meanwhile, my service activities center largely on increasing

particular facet of that research branch. And, meanwhile, my service activities center largely on increasing representation from underrepresented groups in the statistics and larger mathematical science disciplines.

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Ron Wasserstein 02:34

Thank you. So, Kim, I'm just going to start right in with a question for you, okay, and then we'll switch it over to Adrian after that. So, this is the look-ahead question. When you look forward, what would you hope the future of statistics and data science would look like?

K

Kim Sellers 02:50

I hope that it's a discipline where we, as statisticians, remain at the forefront of its development. Certainly at its core, at its base, the concept of data science, data analytics, and its combined branches that comprise the area, of course, center on strong statistical understanding and thinking.

R

Ron Wasserstein 03:18

Thank you so much. Adrian, what's on your mind?

A

Adrian Coles 03:23

Yeah. So, Ron, I think that's a very good question. I think the first thing that comes to mind for me is the acknowledgement or the awareness that statistics is really part of the engine that drives the decision-making across our society. You can look across various sectors, you can look across various institutions that are very important or critical within our society. And, typically at the heart of those, you see some type of quantitative thinking that is rooted in statistical sciences. And understanding that, as a statistician, understanding the value of having a representative sample, it's my hope that the future of our discipline is one where many of our statisticians come to understand the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. So, again, so my hope for discipline is that, as we move into the future, that we will be a leader in this space, that we will embrace the value of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and really work hard to create a culture within our discipline. But this is a value that stands out to people who are looking from the outside in.

R

Ron Wasserstein 04:31

Thank you. So, let's follow up with both of you in whatever order you'd like to take this on just what you were saying. So, you've outlined where you'd like us to be. Where do you see that we are today? And what are sort of some of the major steps you're thinking about to get from here to there? Want to start it off, Adrian?

A

Adrian Coles 04:52

Sure, I'll jump right in. I think that's a very good question, right? I mean, I think it's one thing to have vision and to think about where we should be in the future. But, wow, how do we get there? So, I think it starts with us doing an honest assessment of where we are as a discipline. I think many people who are members of our discipline would acknowledge that the talent that we have from underrepresented social groups is less than what it should be, right? I mean, we could look at the US Census, if we're just talking about the United States, for example, right, we can look at

the US Census, we can understand the distribution of demographics within our country. And then we look within our discipline, our scientific discipline, and we see that, you know, those demographic distributions don't always align. So, we know that there's work to be done. Well, how do we get those? How do we achieve that alignment? I really think we have to start thinking about engaging members of our society at a younger age. We really have to get in front of students when they're younger to help them understand the value of statistics. We have to help them understand the pathways that they can take to enter into this space. In some instances, you might even have to help them overcome some social and mental hurdles that are, you know, associated with various scientific fields, right? But I do think we need to get in front of these students at a younger age, make sure that we are intentional about seeking out diverse talent at a young age. For example, there was a time in my life where I used to tutor at Huntington Learning Center, really great organization and institution. But one of the things I learned during that experience was that most of my students there were not members of disadvantaged and marginalized communities. In many instances, students who were in those communities don't have the additional resources to pay for that supplemental education. But then those are the students who tend to perform well on the math portion of the SAT. And then, as you continue to think about standardized testing and gaining access to, you know, top programs that train statisticians, there are--there's a segment of our population that is left behind, because in some instances, they don't have the resources to keep up with some of their counterparts ... So, how can we come in at an earlier time point and engage and be very intentional about diversifying the candidate pool for those folks who could grow and could become a part of our field in the future?

R

Ron Wasserstein 07:24

Thanks, Adrian. Kim, what's your assessment of where we are and how we get to where you'd like us to be?

K

Kim Sellers 07:30

That's a great question, Ron. And I think in order to answer that question, you have to offer some measure of context with regard to where we are today. Certainly, 2020 was a watershed moment in our society. It brought to light many of the disparities and inequities that exist in our society as a whole. And thus, I think as a STEM organization, I applaud the American Statistical Association for taking a good hard look at where we are as an organization and how we can move forward. For example, again, from a societal perspective, we recognize the health disparities, issues that exist, for example, because of COVID. And also there was more attention brought to matters of bias, say, for example, that come through in algorithmic fairness issues or machine learning and data science disciplines. So, to that end, how can we move forward? I think we're already starting to address these issues now, certainly through the establishment of the JEDI Outreach Group and the Anti-Racism Task Force. These are good first steps. And, of course, both of our organizations are working to establish strategic plans for the ASA and the broader community to try and address or minimize and reduce any sorts of issues that are counter to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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Ron Wasserstein 07:58

Thanks. So, people are hearing this and nodding their heads like I am, and they probably want to know what they can do. So, what are your thoughts on ways that people listening to this--ASA members or others--can join in this effort? Can you just talk about the JEDI Outreach Group? Do you want to say a bit about that and maybe other ideas that you have about ways to take part?

K

Kim Sellers 09:26

Sure. So, the JEDI Outreach Group is working largely as, if you will, a grassroots organization from the ground up.

Obviously, with such an over-encompassing goal to address all matters of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, this is an impossible task for one organization to take on on its own. So, we are relying on not only our direct membership but certainly, if you will, friends of the organization. You don't have to be a member of the JEDI Outreach Group to appreciate and contribute or advocate towards the cause and the mission. So, I would hope that, honestly, that this is something that everyone can see themselves as being a part of and wish to contribute.

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Ron Wasserstein 10:46

Certainly, with regards to the JEDI Outreach Group, there are no barriers to joining. It's free; you don't even have to be an ASA member. Just let us know that you want to take part and I can say a little bit about that. Adrian, what's on your mind about how people can be involved?

A

Adrian Coles 11:02

Yeah, I think there are three things that come to mind immediately, for me: time, talent, and treasure. You know, I would encourage everyone to think about where they are investing their time. Do you have folks in your immediate circle, whether they are mentors, or mentees, or friends, or colleagues, that you do life with in some way, that you contribute your time to in some way, who are from a diverse set of social groups, right? Oftentimes, you know, we tend to be more comfortable in social groups where there are strong similarities, whatever those similarities may be, but we have to be intentional about pushing beyond those boundaries and really investing time into other people who don't fit into those pockets of similarity. The second piece of that is talent, you know, we have some really good programs with, you know, within the Committee of Minorities in Statistics, now the JEDI Outreach Group. And I would even suspect that there might be some additional programs that may come from the work on the Anti-Racism Task Force. Contribute your talent to those organizations, to those programs, to help those programs succeed, whether we're talking about the Diversity Mentoring Program, StatFests, whether we're talking about a number of other programs that I know we have on the table now that we're sort of discussing and figure out which ones to prioritize. There'll be a number of ways that people can contribute their talent to this agenda. And then the last one is treasure. If you are part of an organization who is looking to partner with someone who has a strong value in this space, then we are a good place to partner. We've recently created the BIPOC fund. For those who may not be aware, BIPOC stands for black, indigenous, people of color. And this is a fund that the ASA has created to help fund programs that are intentionally designed to help us to serve this part of our membership, to help us to achieve that vision of becoming an anti-racist organization. And so, if you're a part of an organization who's looking for ways to sponsor or to donate, you know, think of us. You know, we would love to work with you and to partner with you in that way. And if you are a private individual, I mean, we've even had private donors who've come up and made significant contributions, as well. But all of this work that we're talking about is going to take a village; it's not just going to happen from the three or four people that are here having this conversation today. We need everyone to show up; we need everyone to be willing to put their hand to the plow in some way. And in doing so, it's going to help to advance the organization towards that future vision we talked about earlier.

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Ron Wasserstein 13:45

So, there's a call to action there. If, first of all, if you're not an ASA member, join. It's a good idea. If you are an ASA member, thanks. And consider these things that you've heard today. Please consider what role you might play in ASA's JEDI efforts and other projects and plans of the ASA. You have questions about that, you can reach out to any of us. I'm easy to find the ASA's website. Just go to [ron@amstat.org](mailto:ron@amstat.org) and I'd love to hear from you. Again, Adrian and Kim, thank you so very much.

